REAL ROMANCES OF THE BUSINESS WORLD

WOMAN WHO HAS FED A MILLION GIRLS AND NARY A MAN

BY RICHARD SPILLANE.

The woman who was the most famous authority on cookery in America, if not in the world, came to New York and took charge of a great restaurant in the Wall Street district. She had written half a dozen books on culinary affairs, had a wide business experience and was an economist of recognized ability. The establishment she managed was a failure.

A woman who had no reputation as a cook, little experience in that line or in housekeeping, whose ambition was to be a skilful office worker, and who knew more about stenographic pothooks than kettles or pans, started a restaurant in the great business of lower Manhattan, and not only made a remarkable success of it, but to-day fifty establishments patterned to a large degree on the one she introduced are being conducted south of Canal Street.

The man most widely known downtown is J. P. Morgan.

The woman most widely known is Eva Lewis. Morgan's name is in the papers every day. Miss Lewis's name is mentioned once in a year or two, perhaps, but then banks and bonds buns or banquets.

Any one who thinks odd things do not happen in real life these days or that there is not a romantic side to business should know the story of Miss Lewis. She was born and raised in Cincinnati, is a college graduate and was a school teacher for a time. She came to New York to make her way in the world, and, having learned shorthand, became private secretary and stenographer to a prominent druggist. The work suited her, her employer paid her well and she would have been delighted to have retained her position, but her health failed and the doctor told her she would have to leave this climate.

It is bad enough and hard enough for a man to pick up and go to new fields. It is more difficult for a woman. Miss Lewis was told she would have to live in Denver, or some place where the altitude was high. She started from New York sad, but not without courage. In Chicago there were friends whom she had been invited to visit on her journey West, so she stopped at the Lake City to see them.

It was summer—the summer of 1904—and she had not been in Chicago long before the branchial trouble bothered her but little. She could not understand the improvement in her condition, for she supposed the conditions in the Illinois city were as bad for her as those in New York, but so long as she improved in Chicago she determined to remain there. She improved so decidedly that when winter came on she believed she was well again, and determined to return to New York.

She got work in the office of William M. Judd & Co., stock brokers. Among the customers of the house was a Westerner named McKenzie, who had large mining interests and who had the impulsiveness and the broad sympathy of the man who has lived a good portion of life in the great outdoors. One day McKenzie wanted to ascertain if an order he had given had been executed, and all the other instruments being busy he asked permission of Miss Lewis to use her telephone. She handed the desk instrument over to him, he called up the person he sought, spoke with him a few minutes, then set the telephone down.

"Much obliged, Miss Lewis," he said. And then, with that pride or, possibly, vanity with which men like to tell of their good fortune, he added, "I've made $5,000 in the last five minutes."

"Good, good!" exclaimed the stenographer.

The mining man jokingly suggested that she should play the market, and the young woman, in like spirit, said she would save her pennies and the next time he had a real sure thing she would speculate to the extent of 50 cents. Then, seriously, she added that she never expected to have so much as $5,000 in her life.

"What would you do if you had $5,000?" inquired McKenzie.

Do? She would open a restaurant—such a restaurant as New Yirk never had seen before, she said. Then she became eloquent. She told him there were tens of thousands of girls and women working in downtown New York, and the only restaurants open to them were those patronized by men. The restaurant people had an idea the patronage of women did not pay. They knew girls remained longer at table than men. Time was money in a restaurant, particularly a midday restaurant. The restaurant keepers also thought women did not spend much on their eating. Girls, they believed, thought more of dress than food. There were some tables reserved for women, but they were in the rear, near the kitchen, or in some other undesirable spot. Miss Lewis told the Westerner New York had not risen to the need of good restaurants for the women who worked in offices. In Chicago she had seen an eating house exclusively for women. There were rest rooms, recreation parlors, music and a variety of accessories that were a delight to the feminine heart. When she had seen it she had felt that any one who introduced such an institution in New York would be a public benefactor. No one but a woman knew a woman's needs. No one but a woman knew how much such an establishment would appeal to women. She believed it would pay, but whether it would pay or not, New York ought to have it. She told how unpleasant it was for a refined, delicate-minded woman to go into a public retaurant and be subjected to the scrutiny of all sorts of men.

She explained how a woman, no matter how much she needed a few minutes' rest or relaxation, had no opportunity in the lunch hour. If she remained too long at table she was viewed with disfavor by the proprietor. If she went out too early, she had to wander about until it was time to return to the office. There was no place for her to go. Surely with so many thousands of women to draw on for patronage, an establishment that catered to woman's needs would be supported.

"Well, why don't you start one?" asked Mr. McKenzie.

"Why? Because she had no money—nothing but her salary."

"Then," said Mr. McKenzie, in his buoyant, breezy way, "I'll put up the money."

Miss Lewis thought he was joking, or was saying this because he felt so good over the making of the $5,000 in five minutes, but the next morning the Westerner questioned her as to how soon she would need the money.

"Do you really mean it?" she inquired.

"Of course," he replied.

That Day Mr. McKenzie deposited $5,000 in the National Park Bank to the credit of Eva Lewis, and the next day he was off to the West. The stenographer, who knew nothing about cooking, to whom restaurant keeping was a theory, but nothing more, who had ideas, but no experience, then had to turn her back on office work and embark in a new field and prove that she was not altogether a visionary.

On February 14, 1905 (St. Valentine's Day), she opened the queerest restaurant New York had seen up to that time. It was at Fulton and Nassau, two flights up. She called it the Princess Club. Membership cost 25 cents a month. The foodstuffs cost about the same, possibly a little less than in the general run of downtown eating places, but they were the best the market afforded.

If ever a person was proved a true prophet promptly and fully Miss Lewis was in this instance. New York women certainly wanted such a place as the Princess. It did not matter that it way up two flights. It did not matter that it was a bit out of centre of things. It had the conveniences women sought. Girls flocked to it as they never had flocked to a New York eating establishment before. The stairs of the old building creaked under the weight of the multitude that trooped in and out. Within a few weeks the club had 1,600 members. In two months it had 2,000.

Of the $5,000 Mr. McKenzie had put in the National Park Bank to her credit Miss Lewis had use for only $500. That was all she drew. With the $500 she bought such furniture as she required. She did not spend a dollar more than necessary.

There were plenty of settees, plenty of mirrors, plenty of accessories to the toilet, but the tables were plain, the dishes serviceable, but not expensive, and there were magazines and books and pictures and papers and a piano. For the rent and the food supplies she got credit.

Evidently there is money—lots of money—in the restaurant business if properly conducted. Miss Lewis, novice though she was, made money from the start. In March the profit was $750. In April the books showed $940 to the good. In May the Princess cleared $1,284. Then establishments patterned on the Princess idea began to blossom in various places downtown. As they did, the restaurants that formerly looked with some disfavor on feminine patronage suddenly discovered that the trade of the office women was worth having, and they began to cater to it. But it was too late.

A branch of the Princess was started in Broad Street, right in the heart of things in the financial district. Miss Lewis supervised it for two weeks. She had come to be looked upon as an expert by this time. She had been in the business several months. In September a proposition was made to her to open an establishment of higher grade uptown in the centre of the shopping district. The offer was so good she did not see her way to declining it. She was getting a salary from Mr. McKenzie and one-third of the profits. She gave up the Princess and went uptown and opened the Clover in No. 43 West Twenty-first Street. From the $500 of his money she used she says Mr. McKenzie got a profit of more than $7,000 up to the time she got out of the Princess Club.

The Clover was a repetition, after a fashion, of the Princess. No one who did not see it could believe there were so many feminine workers in that part of town. It made money from the day it opened. It probably would be flourishing to-day but for a fire that gutted the upper part of the building in which it was located and drowned out the club. When the building was reconstructed the Clover expected to get its old rooms, but the owner wanted the space for other purposes, and then Miss Lewis turned her attention down town once more. A millionaire heard she was searching for a site. He had a big building, the ground floor of which had been used for years for a restaurant. Various men had conducted the establishment, but none of them seemed able to make it a success. The thing was getting on the nerves of the millionaire. He made an offer to her that was decidedly tempting. She accepted. She put up a gilt sign "Just for Girls," and now man is barred.

Within a few days of her taking charge the place was packed. It rarely had been half filled before. Now the basement is one big recreation room for the patrons. There are lounges and retiring rooms, desks with stationery that is inviting to the girl who has personal correspondence to attend to, music and all sorts of odds and ends that women fancy. Each day at noon there is a concert.

Miss Lewis, keen of eye, mild of voice, watchful and untiring, looks after every detail.

"I was fortunate in the first employment I had in New York," she says. "The druggist for whom I worked conducted his business on the principle: 'Never buy anything but the best and charge a good price for what you sell.' I've never forgotten that and never will. The public has an altogether wrong idea about women. Girls do not skimp in their eating. They spend more proportionately than men. Why, the restaurants down town that appeal to the ordinary run of office men only average 16 cents per person served. The checks in this establishment average 30 cents per person served. And the public has a wrong idea about the pay of women.

"Of course, there are multitudes of girls working for $7, $10, $12, $15 a week, but there are thousands—more thousands than you would suppose—who earn from $20 to $50 a week. It behooves the woman who gets a good salary to eat good foods. To clothe well is important; to eat well is more important.

"It's strange how the idea that women do not spend freely for eatables prevails. As a matter of fact, there hardly is a restaurant down town in which wine or liquors are not sold where the checks average so high as here. Have you any idea how many men rush through luncheon, how many take a gulp of coffee and a few bites of a sandwich? They cannot spare the time to eat, or think they cannot. Those who have time to spare linger long and smoke or drink. The girls want to use up their full luncheon hour. They want an adequate meal and they want an oppertunity to relax. No one knows the needs of woman but a woman.

Some of the establishments designed to cater exclusively to the girl workers have failed, it is true, but it has been from bad management, nothing else. Some tried to sell too cheaply. Some did not know how to cater to their patrons.

"I never have conducted my places on what you might call a hard and fast system. I have no set menu for this day or another. I know the things that are tempting to me, and those are the dishes I have prepared. Nothing ever is served unless it is garnished so as to make it most appetizing. There is an olive, a pickle, a leaf of lettuce with all sandwiches or meats. It is by giving earnest attention to the simpler things that you win approval. Now, a hot roast beef sandwich is a simple thing, isn't it? Usually it is made up of two slices of bread, a generous cut of roast beef and some gravy.

"It makes a fair midday meal taken with coffee or tea and a dessert. But a far more enjoyable hot roast beef sandwich is made of two slices of toast—the toast toasted to a T—a good, generous cut of meat, a baked potato, an olive or a pickle and some lettuce.

"Why do I always have pickle or olive? Well, you know there is something appealing to a woman about them. It may be the same to a woman that the tang of tobacco is to a man. At any rate it is a relish. The person who is in this business and fails to recognize small things of this sort cannot succeed. I constantly am learning. I go to all over town studying. And I have to be mighty discreet, I tell you, for you know I have since 1905 fed a million girls, and wherever I go I'm sure to be recognized. Last Sunday night I went as far afield as Hoboken to see a dish I heard was a novelty, but pshaw! we serve it better here."

Miss Lewis says prices to-day are appalling compared with what they were when she made her first venture. Meats are more than 100 per cent. higher and so are various other supplies. This tremendous increase has come within the six years she has been in business.

"The key to success?" she repeated in answer to question. "I know of no other but to be sensible, honest and painstaking. If you are going to do a thing, do it right. If it is in the matter of making a pie, say an apple pie, put good fresh apples in it. If you are making something with lemon in it, use fresh lemons. Don't cheat your stomach. Good food is cheaper than poor food. You'll have your own self-respect and the respect of your patrons if you do right by them and right by yourself."

Miss Lewis has been too busy to marry. She says she is going better by the instruction she is giving to engaged girls in how to feed husbands. But it isn't because she has not had plenty of offers. When she left the office of Judd & Co. and started the Princess Club a story of her work was printed along with her portrait, and from far and near lonely bachelors and widowers offered their hands and hearts, for she certainly gave every promise of being a good provider. Maybe she has no desires that way, or looks with frowning eyes upon the marriage state, for a young woman who prides herself on the possession of three gray hairs went into the restaurant the other day and, pointing to the "Just for Girls" sign, ventured the suggestion that maybe that would bar her out.

Miss Lewis with a pretty wit replied: "Not at all; not at all. We're all girls until we're married or otherwise incapacitated."

And now the girl with the three gray hairs is wondering what "otherwise incapacitated" means.

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